

OTC Anesthetic Skin Ointments Deadly When Eaten

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## Over-the-Counter Anesthetic Skin Ointments Deadly When Eaten by Small Children



### Source

American College  
of Emergency  
Medicine  
via  
PR NEWSWIRE

WASHINGTON, Oct. 1, 1996 -- Three toddlers died within hours of eating small amounts of over-the-counter pain medications containing dibucaine, an anesthetic often found in ointments for skin pain caused by such things as sunburn, cuts, hemorrhoids, and episiotomies.

Minutes after eating the medicine, the children, who ranged in age from 18 months to two years, became limp and listless, and then had seizures. Each child was rushed to the emergency department, but despite extensive treatment, all suffered cardiac arrest.

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"Dibucaine is more potent than other topical anesthetics, so children only need to swallow small amounts to become seriously ill," says Peter Dayan, MD, an emergency physician in New York, and lead author of the study. "Although dibucaine is not often used, the products it is in are commonly found in homes, and parents often are unaware of the danger."

Only recently has there been an increased awareness of the danger of topical anesthetics. In April 1995, the Consumer Product Safety Commission required child-resistant packaging for products containing dibucaine and lidocaine.

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"Parents need to be educated about toxic medications such as dibucaine which are available over-the-counter, and then check to see if any products in their household contain these ingredients," warned Dr. Dayan. "If there are any such products, they should be locked away, inaccessible to children."

Annals of Emergency Medicine is the peer-reviewed journal of the American College of Emergency Physicians, a national medical specialty society representing nearly 19,000 physicians who specialize in emergency medicine. The College is committed to improving the quality of emergency care through continuing education, research, and public education.

Poison Lookout  
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5/18/2005